John Lewis Smith and Associate c 1871-76
From the Wells Smith Family Album

Reflections

Jeffrey Hunt
October 3 2025

This photo comes from the old Wells Smith Victorian album, which once belonged to my great-great-grandparents, John and Esther Wells Smith. That is John Smith himself on the right, holding a child.

Because it is a tintype, the date is most likely the early 1870s. Depending on which child he is holding, it could reach into the later part of the decade. For now, I place it between 1871 and 1876.

The man on the left remains unidentified. He appears in another photo or two in the same album, but he doesn't match anyone known from other family portraits. My best guess is that he was a friend or a business associate. The setting feels informal—just a sheet strung up as a backdrop, its bottom edge plainly showing. This was not a studio portrait, but perhaps something made at a fair, a gathering, or a community event. Dogs and babies were clearly welcome, which gives the whole scene a warmth and immediacy.

Here is John Smith, about forty years old, his features showing the strong resemblance that still runs through the family today. By this point he had been in Oregon nearly two decades— arriving in 1853, very likely with the Lost Wagon Train. That story is complex and fascinating, and it continues to unfold as more family photos come to light.

For me, this picture is a treasure. Until now, I had only three or four images of my great-great-grandfather. This adds one more—a small increase, but an exciting one – time to celebrate. Each photograph strengthens his presence and deepens the sense of what those pioneer families endured and carried forward.

The tintype itself is just 2 3/8 by 3 7/8 inches. I'd seen it in the album before, but only when enlarged did John Smith's face come through clearly enough to recognize.